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TRENCH TALKS OF THE WORLD WAR

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TRENCH TALKS OF THE WORLD WAR

WASHINGTON DAVIS

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ENTERING THE TRENCHES

One Hundred and Sixty-fifth Infantry (formerly 69th Regiment Infantry, New York National Guard) and 165th Machine Gun Company, First Battalion, entering Trenches, Croismare, France, March 2, 1918.

OH, say, can you see by the dawn's early light
What so proudly we hailed at the twilight's gleaming?
Whose broad stripes and bright stars through the perilous night
O'er the ramparts we watched were so gallantly streaming!
Oh, say, does the Star Spangled Banner yet wave
O'er the land of the free and the homes of the brave?

—Francis Scott Key, Baltimore, 1814.

* * * * *

LIFT up your heads, desponding freedmen—
Fling to the winds your needless fears!
He who unfurled that glorious banner
Said it should wave a thousand years!
A thousand years, mine own Columbia!
'Tis the glad day so long foretold—
'Tis the glad morn whose early twilight
Washington saw in days of old!

—Fragment of Old Song.

[Prospectus]

TRENCH TALKS of the WORLD WAR

AS TOLD BY AMERICAN OFFICERS AND MEN

COMPANION BOOK TO
"CAMP-FIRE CHATS OF THE CIVIL WAR"
EMBRACING THE TRAGEDY, ROMANCE, COMEDY, HUMOR AND PATHOS IN THE VARIED EXPERIENCES OF ARMY LIFE

By WASHINGTON DAVIS
AUTHOR OF "CAMP-FIRE CHATS," "THE PROVOST GUARD," "THE SYNDIC," ETC.

SUBSCRIPTION EDITION

HISTORY PUBLISHING COMPANY
WASHINGTON

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ILLUSTRATIONS

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French Red Cross Feeding German Soldiers . . . . —

OFFICERS AND MEN

Contributors of American historical material in this volume as authorized by the Secretary of War under the direction of the Adjutant General, Major General P. C. Harris, namely:

The Asst. Adjutant General
Brig. Gen. James T. Kerr
The Quartermaster General
Maj. Gen. H. L. Rogers
Col. John S. Chambers
Col. R. H. C. Kelton
Col. W. C. Rivers
Col. Jas. A. Moss
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Lt. Col. Thomas Holcomb
Capt. J. H. Craige
Capt. E. H. Jenkins
Capt. LeRoy P. Hunt
Grover T. Chatman

AVIATION

Maj. A. A. Cunningham
Lt. W. P. T. Hill
Lt. Guy Williamson

AND OTHERS

EXPLANATION

"Trench Talks of the World War," companion book of "Came-Fire Chats," is written and published for the purpose of entertaining and instructing those who want, in addition to their dull conventional history, a more vivid and illuminating view of American events in Europe and elsewhere during and subsequent to hostilities from April 6, 1917, the declaration of war, until the proclamation of peace, August 25, 1921. This volume is authentic American history in narrative form.

Much valuable, interesting, humane history, aside from official reports, would have been lost, as memories grow old and dim, unless these fascinating stories are printed before the officers and men themselves shall have passed beyond the reach of the writers. The publication of these stories, besides furnishing wholesome literature, uncovers at least a few lessons which otherwise would have been lost to future generations; and the movement of 4,000,000 men in battle array to preserve civilization, with the expenditure of nearly $30,000,000,000

of hard-earned American money—indeed, the whole World War with its appalling destruction of human life and property, causing many subsequent years of distress—this military movement and this colossal expenditure of money would have been utterly in vain, and a step would have been taken backward toward the Dark Ages.

Unless we publish the history, all this expenditure of human life and treasure will have been in vain. Civilization barely triumphed over barbarism and the benefits of that triumph can be realized only by a careful study of the records from many points of view.

Just how these 4,000,000 men are to be compensated; just how their services and sacrifices are to be recognized; just when and how this $30,000,000,000 borrowed from the people is to be paid back by ignoring the records and the facts, whether glorious or disagreeable, and by declining their dispassionate discussion; just how these desirable results are to be attained without the printed book, all is not quite clear to the average man's understanding.

Free from political or religious or moral exploitation, or selfish personal ambition, and other befogging elements; impartial in their selection, these

stories may furnish some enlightenment to those who wish to know the truth.

Yet few people realize the difficulties and the magnitude of the work required to gather material of this character for only one volume. It is one thing to plan campaigns, fight battles, feed troops, and furnish comfortable camping grounds; it is quite another, quite as important, to write the history of these operations as obtained from the original, individual sources of personal experiences, observations and reminiscences by officers and men who were in the active overseas service of the World War.

The data for these trench and billet talks and the various incidents that actually occurred on the battlefield or elsewhere have been obtained by more than one hundred and fifty interviews, verified where necessary by military and other records, many of the narratives being tragic, romantic, humorous or pathetic; but in addition to the authentic history herein, all these sidelights will be found reliable.

No one writer could produce these historical stories, which are in no sense a compilation, but are a collection of undoubted historical value. The author's work has been only to turn them into con-

sistent literary form, and his association with the gentlemen of the War Department has been pleasant. Each narrator's name and rank is printed with his story, and the teller of each story is therefore responsible for the tale he has told, which is in the English language sufficiently terse and plain, so that when one sentence has been spoken it does not require a paragraph or a whole volume of platitudes to explain what he said.

Conversations and statements of officers and men generally will be found in quotation marks ("—"), while historical researches by the improvised Code Company are in brackets ([—]).

American literature owes to these accomplished contributors its due appreciation; whether or not this debt is ever paid is for the reader to determine. The interviews to obtain the material for these "talks" were authorized by the following letter:

WAR DEPARTMENT
THE ADJUTANT GENERAL'S OFFICE
WASHINGTON

Mr. Washington Davis,
Washington, D. C.

My dear Mr. Davis:

In reply to your request for authority to interview officers and enlisted men of the

army with a view to securing material for a book to be entitled "Trench Talks of the World War," or similar title, I have the honor to advise you, by authority of the Secretary of War, that you are at liberty to obtain such interviews as you desire.

Under existing orders and regulations, members of the military service are allowed to publish or furnish for publication whatever they desire unless the matter is confidential or of a nature which might be prejudicial to the service. For the protection of members of the service furnishing matter for the book, it is requested that such matter be submitted to the Adjutant General of the Army before publication, as you have suggested, to insure that there is no objection to the publication.

You are at liberty to use this letter to assist in obtaining interviews if you so desire.

Very truly yours,

P. C. HARRIS,

The Adjutant General.

WHERE AMERICANS DEFEATED GERMANS

The illustration opposite this page shows the wrecked bridge over the Marne River and ruined buildings at Chateau-Thierry, where machine gunners of Third Division held ground. One Hundred and Fifteenth Field Artillery on the way to relieve 26th Division, Chateau-Thierry, France, July 25, 1918.

"CALAMITY JANE," LAST AMERICAN GUN

The illustration opposite this page shows "Calamity Jane," the last gun fired on the American front, and First Lieutenant H. F. Phillips, who fired it. Official time, 10:59:59; actual time, 11:05 a. m., November 11, 1918. This was Gun No. 2 of Battery E, 11th Field Artillery. Serial No. 3125. It was also the first gun to hit the Sedan-Metz Railroad. Bois de la Haie, on the Laneuville sur Meuse-Beauclair Road, Meuse, France. November 16, 1918.

AFTER BELLEAU WOOD BATTLES

The illustration opposite this page shows marines en route to rest camp after 16 days at the front, First Battalion, Fourth Brigade, Fifth United States Marines, Second Division, Major J. S. Turrill, commanding. (Remains of battalion after two replacements.) On road between Montrieul and Chateau-Thierry, France. June 18, 1918.

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AS the curtain rolls upward exposing to view the vivid history of the greatest military upheaval which this grand, beautiful old world has ever seen, a few strong side-lights upon the various features of Army life as it really is nowadays, show many interesting and peculiar things pertaining to the World War, as well as many vivid stories in American history as disclosed by the officers and men whose every act and deed are a part of our history during that period.

The hidden evils of Europe were showing themselves frequently along our sea coasts as well as in our great cities and the nations and peoples overseas were calling, calling, calling for help—calling for money—for hard-earned dollars, for dimes, for pennies, pounds sterling, shillings, pence, marks, francs, rubles, lire, and yen; begging for food, for guns, ammunition, troops, and ships. The thrill of war at

a distance, but fast approaching our shores, kept America on the tip-toe of expectation and the drum-beat and the heart-beat of this nation quietly but eagerly marked time against the day when activities should begin; so that we were not entirely unprepared for the declaration of war against Germany and were ready, as we always are, in some respects, to take our places on the firing line along with the troops of the allies in their desperate conflict for the defense of civilization.

American public sentiment had drawn its conclusion and with its conclusion had drawn its sword.

But a soldier can not fight unless he eats and sleeps, has a comfortable uniform, a good gun, and plenty of ammunition, with necessary transportation. These had to be provided quickly. The hurried but real activities of war, as usual, demanded much from the Quartermaster's Corps of the Army before American valor, gentility, manhood and honor, theretofore unconquered and unconquerable, could be pitted against the perjured pledges, broken treaties, or "scraps of paper" of the Kaiser, whose subjects had been carefully trained and prepared for half a century for the resort to arms.

To provide transportation and supplies for three million American troops recruited three thousand

miles from the battlefields, across an ocean, was indeed a gigantic task. The need of the world-renowned, famous American army mule, with his long, honorable record of unflinching Civil War service, was not less keenly felt than the want of the modern motor car, and also ships, ships, ships. To find a suitable troop ship for the first contingent of the expeditionary forces to France, was the duty of Colonel John S. Chambers, of the Quartermaster General's staff, and his experience before and during this voyage is characteristic.

"Possibly our people have never realized the important role that America played in the late World War," said Colonel Chambers in beginning these "Talks." Those of us who served overseas were muzzled by censorship, and since the war natural modesty has served in most instances to prevent us from blowing our own horn. However, I am convinced that, as time goes on, the part that America's munitions, supplies, money, and men played in this war will be more appreciated. The fact that the American corps with the British stiffened the British resistance and added just the little additional weight that was required to bring about an offensive is known to those who participated and to our higher officers, but probably to few others.

"The fact that the little handful, so to speak, of American troops undoubtedly stopped the great German drive on Paris is probably not appreciated by those who have not carefully studied the situation. Few suspect that the capture of St. Mihiel was one of the most notable pieces of military tactics employed during the war. Probably few have realized that our own great commander in chief was the strongest advocate of offensive warfare in Europe, and that those grilling and gruelling drives by American Armies went a long way toward breaking the backbone of German resistance. In this talk, however, I will keep away from dry history and try to give a human-interest story of the American Expeditionary Force on the Mayflower ship, the Baltic, in May, 1917.

"In April, 1917, after the declaration of war, I was ordered to Washington, D. C., for duty in the office of the Quartermaster General. Upon arrival in Washington I was assigned to duty under the immediate supervision of General A. L. Smith. Among the duties which fell to my lot were arranging for the field ranges and bakery equipment for an army of a million men and for a reserve for another million, and planning the rolling kitchens which were adopted and used by our Army throughout the war.

At this time the Quartermaster General's office had become a hive of industry, and about the middle of May, if my memory serves me correctly, a few officers of the Quartermaster Corps were given to understand confidentially that they were to go over with the headquarters.

"I shall never forget the manner in which the news was finally broken to me that I was to be a member of the expedition. On May 16, at about 10 a. m., I had received a telegram from Marfa, Texas, to the effect that a small son had arrived in my family and that all was well. While I was reading this telegram I had a telephone message and someone at the other end announced that it was the office of the Chief of Staff and that I was to report to the office of the Chief of Staff at 3 p. m.

"When I walked into the room you can imagine my surprise when I saw sitting over in one corner of the room, General Pershing; in another section of the room, General (then Major) James G. Harbord, and in another section, Colonel Alvord and Major John L. Hines, Major Fox Connor, Lieutenant Collins and two or three others. I didn't know what was up, but was informed that I was to be a quartermaster with the expedition to France. The news took me so by surprise that I was unable to say any-

thing, but managed to mumble, 'Well, I will do the best I can. Is there anything else I can do?'

"Our problem in arranging for anticipated needs of the expedition to France and whatever troops were to follow was an exceedingly difficult one. We did not have much definite information upon which to base our actions. No one could foresee what the conditions would be in France, and we had only a short time in which to make any preparations. To show some of the difficulties under which we worked, I might say that I remember that we arranged to have the hold of the first troop ship sent over filled with cordwood, so that we would have plenty of fuel. We had heard that the fuel supply of France was scarce. However, it later developed that there was probably more standing timber in France than the expeditionary forces could use. But we were not the only ones who were handicapped. Our good friends, the Signal Corps, lumbered up the Baltic with about twenty-seven ordinary long American wooden telephone poles, and these were carried all the way, I think, to Paris before they were finally disposed of. I say this not in a spirit of criticism, but simply to show the conditions which confronted us.

"Colonel J. M. Carson, who was then depot quar-

termaster at New York, was instructed to see what arrangements could be made for the transportation of the party overseas. As a result of his inquiries and the action by the War Department, accommodations were finally engaged for the entire party on the White Star steamship Baltic. The sailing date was postponed two or three times, and it became quite a joke to those of us who were in the party as to whether we should sail tomorrow or not.

"I look back on those few days spent in Washington as days of the most intense strain, with possibly one exception, through which I have ever passed. On account of my being the only officer of the Quartermaster Corps assigned to the expedition who was on duty in Washington, it seemed that there were a million questions popped at me every day for solution, not only by the officers who were going over, but by telephones and telegrams by members of the party inquiring about arrangements and giving notification of their arrival. Field clerks, civilian clerks, interpreters, and enlisted men, all of whom had received secret orders, came at me with multitudes of questions. The party was gradually increased, and I doubt very much if anyone other than the commander-in-chief and his immediate staff knew who were to sail until he was finally aboard the ship and out of the harbor.

"We were directed verbally to leave Washington separately and go to New York in our civilian clothes, so as not to attract attention. We were ordered to report to Governor's Island, N. Y., at a certain hour and date. The morning we reached Governor's Island was a typical chilly, foggy, drizzly New York harbor day. As I now recall that little assemblage. I do not believe I ever saw a collection of more varied styles of civilian clothes. Some, who had been on duty in the cities and had bought their new Easter suits, looked like an advertisement for a clothing store. Others, like myself, who had been on duty for several years on the border, showed that we had not recently consulted a tailor nor had had time to go to a clothing store and buy a hand-me-down. Hats of the vintage from 1898 to 1917 were in evidence. There were neckties of every hue of the rainbow and trousers of solid colors in black, tan, and gray, and some striped; some did not fit very well and looked as if they had been borrowed from civilian friends.

"Speaking of uniforms, the nearest I ever came to seeing the King of England was to see him in the movie, and he was dressed in the ordinary dress of the British officer. I never saw the President of France, but the highest officials I saw were dressed

in civilian suits apparently made for comfort. As for the uniforms of French officers, most every officer you met had some sort of a different uniform. Taking it all in all, however, I do not think they had as many varieties as our olive drab.

"Coming back to our departure, we cruised around the fog in New York Harbor an hour or so and soon there appeared out of the distance the bulky outlines of the good ship Baltic. I have read as a boy about pirates forcing people to walk the gangplank, but until my experience in walking across the slick and slim gangplank from the harbor steamer into the side of the Baltic, I never realized what it meant. The sea was choppy and rough, it was a windy day, and the little steamer tossed up and down like a cork, but we all managed some way or another to clamor aboard. Some of the trunks containing full regalia and uniforms slid overboard in the attempt to get them into the Baltic, but as it turned out, those who lost their trunks were fortunate because they had fewer difficulties on arriving on the other side, and there was hardly any occasion to use them.

"Our trip over was not particularly exciting. We cruised about a day or so off a place alleged to be Halifax, although I have not to this date discovered where it was. I had never been on a ship the size

of the Baltic before and I spent considerable time rambling around in places where I was permitted to go examining the ship. Colonel McCarthy, our chief quartermaster, called the officers of the Quartermaster Corps together. In addition to the regular officers there were a number of emergency officers who spoke French and who later joined our party. We had conferences and talks and discussions and formed such plans as we could concerning our duties. Being the junior regular quartermaster aboard, I was assigned the unromantic task of remaining behind the main party and taking care of the baggage.

"There were several members of the British Military Mission aboard and we were frequently assembled in one of the saloons behind closed doors, where these gentlemen gave some of us our first insight into the real hell that war is. We also divided into small sections of about five officers to a class and took up the study of French. We were instructed to learn to sing the Marseillaise in French. I leave to hearer or reader to imagine the musical effect obtained by a bunch of American Army Officers, who were not noted for their accomplishments as vocal artists, to be thus called upon to render an air in French. I think there were one or two Frenchmen aboard, but during our music lessons they were not within sight or hearing.

BOOKS WORTH READING

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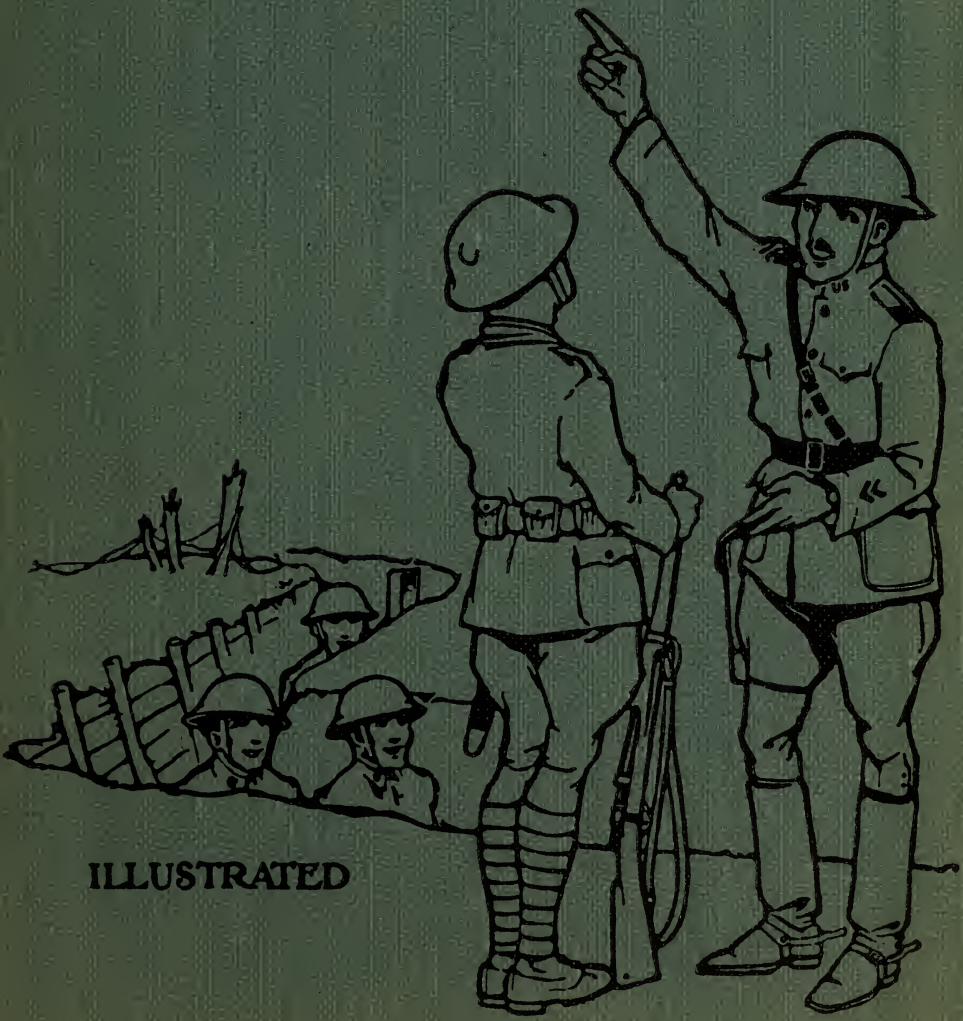

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